

VZCZCXRO8181
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #2415/01 2011224
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 201224Z JUL 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2357
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002415

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/19/2017

TAGS: [IZ](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: DCM BUTENIS' JULY 19 MEETING WITH IRAQI FOREIGN
MINISTER ZEBARI

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Patricia Butenis for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

11. (S) Summary: In a July 19 meeting with DCM, FM Zebari asked for USG assistance in ensuring that the next trilateral meeting between the U.S., Iraq, and Iran be held at the Foreign Ministry rather than the Prime Minister's office (Zebari said he recently told PM Maliki that Maliki's presence at the trilateral was "not necessary.") Zebari side-stepped a U.S. request for an official invitation to the July 26 Refugee Working Group meeting in Amman, saying the decision was not in Iraq's hands. He complained that Jordan had been unhelpful in scheduling the meeting. On the Security Working Group meeting in Damascus, Zebari noted the need to confront the Syrians with hard evidence of their misbehavior. Turning to the upcoming Neighbors' Conference in Istanbul, Zebari said it would be "impossible" to hold the meeting during the first week of September due to conflicts with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Arab League. DCM Butenis pushed back, emphasizing the need to demonstrate progress. Finally, Zebari said he had not yet decided whether to accept an invitation to Moscow for August 17-18; he denied that the Lukoil deal is back on the table but rather suggested that Russia was interested in the possibility for arms deals following news of an Iraqi arms purchase from China. End Summary.

Zebari Tries to Shoulder Maliki out of Iran Trilateral

12. (S) In a July 19 courtesy call by DCM Butenis, Iraqi Foreign Minister Zebari said he was disappointed by the performance of the Iraqi representatives during the last U.S.-Iraq-Iran trilateral meeting. According to Zebari, the Iraqi delegates had merely observed when they should have been making tough points to the Iranians. He argued that the next meeting should be different, and suggested moving the venue for the next meeting to the Foreign Ministry, ostensibly to facilitate protocol needs and handling of the press. In fact, Zebari's real goal appeared to be wresting control of the meeting away from Prime Minister Maliki's office, and he candidly admitted having recently advised Maliki that his presence at the next trilateral would not be necessary. (Zebari asked that the USG reinforce the message, which suggests that Maliki was not entirely swayed by Zebari's argument.)

13. (S) As for the agenda, Zebari predicted that the Iranians would try to leverage any future meeting into a discussion of subjects other than Iraq. He therefore proposed focusing the next trilateral on telling Iran that its behavior in Iraq is unacceptable. He also noted that the Iranians will be expecting a more detailed response to their proposal for a trilateral security commission, a proposal that he characterized as a ploy intended to deflect any criticism of Iran's activities in Iraq (i.e., if the U.S. were to present evidence of Iran's misdeeds, the Iranians would insist on

referring the allegations to the commission). Zebari said he had advised the Iranian ambassador that Iran should demonstrate its seriousness about the talks by sending a high-ranking official from Tehran to reinforce the Iranian delegation.

Refugees Working Group

14. (C) Turning to the July 23 meeting in Amman of the Refugees Working Group, DCM Butenis pressed Zebari for a formal invitation for the U.S. to attend the meeting in observer status. Zebari side-stepped the request by saying that the decision was not his (or Iraq's) to make; given the multilateral nature of the working group, the other members would need to be consulted. Moreover, he said that if the U.S. were granted observer status, then other states -- including Japan, Russia, and the EU -- would clamor to attend as well. He added that the Jordanians had been notably unhelpful in preparing for the working group meeting, first by repeatedly declining to finalize a date for the meeting, and then by insisting that the meeting be shortened to one day from two. He appealed for Embassy Amman's assistance in encouraging the Jordanians to be more cooperative, and he noted that the Iraqi delegation would be Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Hamoud.

Security Working Group/Neighbors' Conference

15. (C) With respect to the Security and Borders Working Group meeting in Damascus (August 2-3), Zebari said it was time to confront the Syrians with "hard evidence" of their misbehavior. The Iraqi delegation would be led by DFM Labeed Abbawi, who would compare notes with the U.S. and UK missions

BAGHDAD 00002415 002 OF 002

before heading to Damascus. As for the proposed Neighbors' Conference in Istanbul, Zebari said it would be impossible to hold the conference during the first week of September due to a competing NAM meeting in Tehran and an already scheduled meeting of the Arab League. He also questioned the wisdom of holding a second Neighbors' Conference before the working groups have shown results. The DCM pushed back, reminding Zebari of the need to demonstrate progress on the diplomatic front.

Zebari's Visit to Moscow

16. (C) Zebari confirmed that he had received an invitation to visit Moscow on August 17-18, but said he had not yet decided whether to accept. He was initially elliptical about the agenda for such a visit, but denied that the Lukoil deal was back on the table. "No, no, no," he murmured soothingly. Instead, he suggested that the Russians were interested in exploring potential arms sales, adding that their interest was piqued by a recent Iraqi arms deal with China.

CROCKER